

TO THE PEOPLE OF ALABAMA

There has been recommended by two committees a so called "Modified Gorgas Bill" which if enacted into law will make only superficial changes in our health system possibly not even causing a change of office holders. There is no surrender in this bill of the essential point at issue, the rule of a class in preference to the rule of the people.

Gorgas and the Bogus Bill.

A so called "Birmingham Bill" was gotten up by self styled Progressives several week prior to the meeting of the state medical association which convened in Birmingham this year. Dr. Gorgas had been asked to give the outline of a good health system for Alabama and he responded by suggesting a system compatible with American institutions, a system over which the people would be supreme and Dr. Gorgas' definition of people is sufficiently broad as to embrace others as well as physicians. Dr. Gorgas believes in a House of Commons without an additional House of Lords either as a supreme or advisory body. With the announcement of Dr. Gorgas' views the insurgents were thrown into dismay for their hopes were blasted. Rallying they decided to call their bill the "Modified Gorgas Bill", for the name of Gorgas would carry influence. Pray let them tell us why they chose to modify a bill offered by an Alabamian and a sanitarian whose fame extends from pole to pole. Let them state the modifications. Their course is similar to the use of neutral flag by belligerents. Let us impress upon all that the "Modified Gorgas Bill" is in the essential and unessential features the same "Birmingham Bill" as of yore.

"Disgruntled" Doctors.

Dr. Baker states that the "disgruntled" doctors are divided. We are pleased to state that the division is on his side of the house as to who shall have the "spoils." We are the real "progressives", the real reformers. We are fighting for principles and not against men. Man occupies but a moment upon the world's stage. Principles live on forever. The present system is a tyranny not because Dr. Sanders is chief but because the system is wrong in principle as well as in practice. A function that belongs to the government is turned over to the medical association and the spurious "Modified Gorgas Bill" makes no change. "Disgruntled!" "Query:" Were Washington and Jefferson and Jeff Davis and Martin Luther disgruntled? We can state that Czar Nicholas was not disgruntled until the Nihilists and Emperor William "got in behind him."

Tried and the Untried.

Dr. Baker says that we ought not to give up the tried for the untried. The system that Mr. Shapiro offers has been tried in all but three states of the union. Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota have tried this system and their systems make our antiquated system seem "laughable."

Democracy and More Word Juggling.

Dr. Baker states that because eight or some small

number of persons would elect the health ~~system~~ ^{board} under the so called "Modified Gorgas Bill" that the system would be less democratic than the present system is. Then America is not democratic because the President and governors have so much power of appointment. It is owing to the method of electing the eight officers. One may be as democratic as forty and more so because the responsibility is placed somewhere. In the so called "Modified Gorgas Bill" six of the eight members and therefore the controlling power of the board are not placed there by the people and hence the plan proposed is anything but democratic but the wonderful number EIGHT (8) has nothing to do with it. This juggling with words makes me "almost persuaded" to believe anything, even that "a cat has nine lives."

Mad Dogs and our Health System.

Is that the test of a health system for a few frightened people to get in behind some frightened dog and ship its head to Montgomery when thousands are dying all over the state from consumption, typhoid fever, pellagra, and even small pox without a voice being raised in many instances? Mad dogs cause phobias. England, Norway, Sweden, and even inland countries like Germany have solved the mad dog problem by requiring all dogs to be muzzled until rabies disappear. What do the masses know about sanitary measures to prevent hookworm infection? How many children are going to school that need medical inspection and possibly medical and surgical attention? How many lives of babies are saved by our health system? After many years of trial our vital mortality statistics are still so deficient that Alabama is not on the registration area and we do not know how high an infant mortality we have. What are the masses being taught about hereditary diseases? Of what value has the re-discovery of Mendel's law been to our health system? The state health board constantly refers to yellow fever, one of the "has beens." This is another dog fright. More persons died from tuberculosis in the United States last year than yellow fever has destroyed in 115 years in the same country. Yellow fever is easily managed in this country as soon as winter sets in when the steegmya mosquito is put out of commission. So active are county health officers that Dr. Oates has given most of them that proud title of pensioners. Yellow fever! What about smallpox? It has been all over the state ever since the Spanish-American war.

Laymen and Health Boards.

Dr. Baker ridicules the idea of laymen being on health boards claiming they will blush from embarrassment. Look out, "the shoe may be on the other foot."

Is Dr. Baker trying to "guy" us? Laymen make some of the most valuable members of health boards in this country as Drs. Chapin, Hillis, Cole, and other eminent sanitarians state. If some physicians and members of all classes would have good business men to direct their affairs they would be of more service to themselves, their families, and their fellowmen. Caesar introduced reforms into Rome; Napoleon with all of his wars did much for the internal affairs of France, yet they knew

nothing about carrying out the details of the work they inaugurated. How much did Napoleon know about the Code Napoleon? Although a soldier by profession he met with the board and "gave sagacious criticism and suggestion. Did any Bourbon lawyer of the highest legal attainment accomplish so much? A strong layman who can judge men and who can consult the wisest on any special line may have more will power, organizing genius, and executive ability than a thousand persons who can write prescriptions in exceedingly common Latin for a curable and many incurable diseases, and yet haven't the backbone to make men pay for the prescriptions.

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Dr. Chapin states that a majority on the state board of health should be laymen, because a board of health is really a legislative and advisory body and laymen can look at matters from different angles, that physicians thinking that they know something about public health work will advise the health officer wrongly, that physicians are not necessarily scientists and that our medical schools do not foster a knowledge of science, although the laity and physicians think otherwise. Dr. Chapin does not believe in local boards of health but thinks we should have all time district or county health officers who need not necessarily be medical men. A layman who is trained say in a school similar to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where a thorough scientific training much of it along public health lines makes a better health officer "than a medical man not so trained, but a medical man thus trained is better than either." The idea conveyed is that public health work is a specialty "quite apart from curative medicine." The bill advocated by Mr. Shapiro is abreast with the times and should be substituted for the "Bogus Gorgas Bill." Mr. Shapiro's bill calls for a majority of the board to be laymen; it divorces the medical association from public health matters.

The Governor, the People, and Power.

Dr. Baker in his attack on the "Bogus Gorgas Bill" is afraid of the governor's power and hence he must be afraid of the people, for the people have the power to change governors every four years and if the governor abuses the power of appointment, this should be exposed and the senate can confirm his appointments as the United States' senate confirms the appointments of a president. Responsibility is concentrated in the governor and yet the legislators fresh from the people could guard against any abuse of that power. Our health department is now and will continue, if the "Modified Gorgas Bill" passes, in the hands of the medical association that cannot be reached by the people. Certainly doctors can be accused of selfishness, of "dabbling in politics" as well as governors or the representatives of the people could be. So Dr. Baker "involves himself in an inconsistent position" when he states that "human nature is the same in Alabama as elsewhere" and yet leaves us to infer that "politics" cannot control "the powers that be" in the medical association, which is in Alabama.

If the power to control the health department is given to the state medical association, why should the state interfere with the form of government that the medical association chose to continue by an overwhelming vote? You are willing to trust the medical association with the administration of health affairs and yet you refuse to trust it with the administration of its own affairs.

The Shapiro Bill and the Wrongly Named "Modified Gorgas Bill."

There are two bills before the legislature, the Shapiro Bill imposing trust in the people and the so called "Modified Gorgas Bill" that distrusts the people. On which side will the representatives of the people cast their lot? The Shapiro Bill is modeled after the health laws of "the bay state time-honored Massachusetts." It should really bear the name of "Modified Gorgas Bill." The defenders of the Shapiro Bill under the name of House Bill 1260 court the working of their system in other states. They do not pretend that their system is otherwise than it is. Going back again we can quote Dr. Chapin by stating that Dr. Lederle of New York was a non medical man who made a successful sanitarian. "Montclair, Plainfield, Summit, and Orange, New Jersey, and the combined Welesley health district in Massachusetts have all had very successful non medical graduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for their health officers. *the u*

Democracy and Health Systems.

There are just two phases of the subject to consider, the one above all being the upholding of the principles of our government, the other being the organization of an efficient health system compatible with those principles. Here, too, in the search for authority we must consult specialists. The founders of our government would have never entertained any such undemocratic ideas, no matter if they had been brought forward by scheming politicians under a deceptive plea of democracy or by others under the guise of efficiency or philanthropy of freedom from politics. In regard to sanitary matters we must look for specialists who combine a knowledge of sanitary matters with a knowledge of our institutions. The surgeon does not consult the general practitioner in regard to the technique of an operation. A man may be an efficient criminal lawyer and a poor civil lawyer. The specialists who are entitled to a hearing are with us.

Bad Precedent.

It is a bad precedent to have the medical association or any other organization to control affairs of government. Little things can develop into big things. Though the real man is what he is from inheritance, nevertheless the actions of the man, the ideals and beliefs held are largely due to environment, and wrong ideals that creep in our minds day by day are not easily eradicated. *OK* course in regard to the matter before us is evidence of the truth of this statement. Years ago this un-American principle of permitting a medical association to take charge of affairs of our government crept in without much notice, and so it has fastened itself into our body politic and the suggestion of a change paralyzes the wills of many. "A little fire is quickly trodden under foot which suffereth rivers cannot quench."

Physicians and Altruism.

Gentlemen of the legislature, fellow physicians of Alabama, when I think what physicians have done for the rights of man as recorded on the pages of history, I cannot believe that all physicians in Alabama and especially in the legislative halls will suppress those altruistic tendencies of their natures by the spirit of egoism. Dr. Benjamin Rush, the American Hippocrates was one of the

signers of the declaration of independence. He and James Pemberton organized one of the first antislavery societies in America and if their advice had been heeded, the North and South would not have continued to import slaves into this country and thus sow the seeds of discord that were destined to ripen into future fratricidal strife. Fidelity to any fraternal or other order dwindles into insignificance in comparison with loyalty to the rights of man and to American institutions.

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Appropriation.

When Alabama divorces her government from the medical association the legislature should curtail expenses elsewhere so that \$100,000 can be appropriated to carry out health work. Then and not till then should this be done. Then and not until then will the urchin of the

hills bloodless from hookworm infection, the mother who has looked for the last time upon her infant cold in death, the laborers at sawmills long suffering from the ravages of malaria,—then and not until then can all the citizens of Alabama from whence the Tennessee whispers in words of complaint and hope to the Gulf where the “wild waves” speak in a thousand tones of sadness and of joy and high resolve,—then and not till then can all arise and call thee blessed. Then and not till then can we emblazon above “Alabama—here we rest” the throbbing words of Alabama—here we go forward.

W. B. PALMER.

Furman, Ala.,

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